

Over the course of her nearly 30-year career, Jacqueline Humphries (b. 1960, New Orleans) has emerged as a singular force in contemporary art, an influential “artist’s artist” whose signature abstract works in metallic and ultraviolet pigments must be experienced firsthand. Jacqueline Humphries is the artist’s first solo museum exhibition in nearly a decade, and the first to include both her silver and black-light paintings. The exhibition debuts a new body of works, created with Carnegie Museum of Art’s (CMOA) unique spaces in mind.

Humphries’s densely layered, atmospheric canvases activate, and are activated by, the space around them. The muted metallic surfaces of the silver paintings respond to shifting natural light and change with the movements of the viewer, positioning abstract painting as a theatrical, time-based art. “I think a painter’s first job is to get someone to look at a painting,” she says. “Perhaps it’s about motion and light. Having a heightened sense of the painting changing in front of your eyes gives it an almost cinematic quality—light moves across the surface and makes new images before your eyes.” The black-light paintings reveal their true nature—and actually emit light—only when “excited” by ultraviolet bulbs. These paintings are hung in a darkened environment, immersing viewers in spectacular fluorescence, and amplifying their awareness of viewing, and being viewed by others. Both bodies of works self-consciously engage the history of art and refer to popular culture as well, melding the drips, zips, and Ben-day dots of mid-century abstraction with psychedelia and cinema’s silver screen.

While in dialogue with history, Humphries’s work also acknowledges the ways pictures have changed in the era of screen culture, using painting as one (no less viable) tool among many for making new images. With the purchase of an industrial stencil cutter for her studio, she has begun incorporating repeating patterns into her work, layering planes of dots, x’s, emoticons, and canvas weave over and in with expressionistic swaths of brushstrokes. While her work has often alluded to the image space of cinema and television, Humphries’s most recent work suggests the stacked and simultaneous planes of computer screens.

Methodically built up and then scraped, smeared, and painted over again, the surfaces of Humphries’s paintings are unstable topographies that alternately cohere and disintegrate, inviting close looking but escaping total apprehension; the viewer and painting work together in a continually unfolding experience. As a result, her works are impossible to truly see online. They demand you be here, now, with them, and that you really look.

Jacqueline Humphries is the 74th installment in Carnegie Museum of Art’s Forum series. The exhibition is organized by Amanda Donnan, assistant curator of contemporary art, and will open

with a free, public reception on the evening of June 10, 2015. It will travel to Contemporary Art Center New Orleans in November 2015.

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